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USSR/WARSAW PACT: HOW MUCH AIDS?

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cases of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) are being identified in the USSR and East Germany. Numbers reported vary from 1,000 cases for the entire USSR to 15,000 for Moscow alone. (For comparison, the total number of AIDS cases reported in the United States was 10,226 as of 13 May 1985 and 762 for Europe as of 31 December 1984.) The Soviets reportedly plan to begin systematic laboratory testing of donated blood and blood samples from suspected patients, but have not yet done so. Increased funds (amounts unreported) are being allotted for AIDS-related research and for public health activities. The existence of AIDS in the USSR has been officially denied by the Soviets and does not appear for either the USSR or Warsaw Pact countries in World Health Organization reporting for Europe.

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Comment:

The failure to report AIDS, which currently is incurable, follows a general Soviet policy not to admit the existence of any sexually transmitted disease, despite the fact that AIDS also is transmitted by various means other than sexual contact.

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Soviet officials and external observers have stated that the USSR's health care system is performing poorly and failing to meet the country's needs. The challenge of coping with an AIDS epidemic may further expose the weakness of Soviet medical care and damage public confidence in the government's competence.

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